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Salem City Hall  
93 Washington Street  
Salem  
Essex County  
Massachusetts

HABS No. MA-1

P H O T O G R A P H S

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20240

AMERICA'S CITY HALLS

SALEM CITY HALL  
93 Washington Street  
Salem, Massachusetts  
Essex County

Listed on the National Register  
of Historic Places in 1972.

Continuously occupied by local government since construction in 1838.

Salem was the second city to be incorporated in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, on March 23, 1836. From the outset, proper accommodation for the City Council and City Offices was a concern, and a committee led by Mayor Leverett Saltonstall was appointed in May of 1837 to oversee construction of a City Hall. A previous committee had found that conversion of the Town Hall would be inappropriate and deprive the community of a primary place of public assembly. Plans progressed for a hall "which should unite beauty and convenience, as far as is consistent with the moderate expense proposed to be incurred. They accordingly made application to an architect of high reputation." (Report of the Committee, June 5, 1837)

The Salem Gazette of September 12, 1837 reported on a ceremony held the previous day to lay the cornerstone of the new building. This account listed Richard Bond as the architect. Bond (1797-1861) was an established Boston architect at the peak of his career. He was simultaneously engaged in the construction of Lewis Wharf, and the design for City Hall fits easily into his typical Granite Style repertoire. The cornerstone also identified Simeon M. Coburn and Augustus M. Coburn as masons, and John Clark, Jonathan Brown, and Ephraim Brown, Jr., as carpenters for the project. The building was dedicated on June 7, 1838 (Gazette, 6/8/1838).

Early photographs in the collection of the Essex Institute confirm visual evidence that the building's appearance is unaltered from the original. In 1876, the needs of the growing city required an addition that nearly doubled the size of the hall by extending the rear of the building. This addition also incorporated a fireproof vault. (Old Naumkeag) In 1976, additional fireproof vaults were added in a tower at the rear wall of the structure.

Funding for the construction of Salem City Hall was the \$40 million surplus federal revenue distributed to the states in 1837. Salem's entire share of this windfall totalled \$33,843, of which \$22,878 was appropriated for the construction and furnishing of this building.

Important political figures associated with the building include former mayors Leverett Saltonstall, Rev. Charles W. Upham, Gen. William Cogswell, Gen. Henry Kemble Oliver and George J. Bates, all of whom went on to serve in state and federal governments.

Salem City Hall is a brick bearing wall structure two stories high, with a three-bay granite facade. The broad pilasters which separate the bays support a heavy entablature and parapet, crowned by a replica of the original gold eagle carved by Samuel McIntire. Its only ornament is the band of carved granite wreathes punctuating the frieze. A short flight of granite steps leads to the center entrance, where monumental double doors are simply framed. The window openings are not articulated. The building's other elevations are functional, and trimmed only by a brick entablature echoing that of the facade.

CITY HALL - SALEM, MA.Historic Significance

Salem was the second city in Massachusetts to be incorporated (1836) and Leverett Saltonstall was Salem's first mayor. The City Hall was built in 1837-38 under the supervision of Mayor Saltonstall and a committee appointed for that purpose. Besides the Mayor, the Committee included Council President John Glen King, Aldermen Abijah Northey and Oliver Parsons and Councillors John Russell, David Putnam and Richard S. Rogers. The cornerstone was laid on September 6, 1837. Artifacts buried beneath the cornerstone included copies of local newspapers, the Mayor's speech for the organization of city government (May 9, 1836), and the City Charter.

The City Hall was built from the surplus revenue of the United States Treasury distributed in 1837 to the states and by the latter to the towns and cities. Salem received nearly \$34,000 of the \$40 million U. S. surplus. The building cost \$22,878 when finished; this is perhaps one of the few municipal structures in existence paid for without taxing the citizens. It was first occupied by the City Council on the evening of May 31, 1838. The formal dedication was on June 8, 1838.

Since 1837, the building has served as the focal point for the decision-making process in Salem. Such men as Saltonstall, Reverend Charles W. Upham, General William Cogswell, General Henry Kimble Oliver and George J. Bates not only occupied City Hall as mayors of Salem, and thereby took part in the political process, but subsequently went on to serve the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, as well as the Congress of the United States, in a distinguished manner.

The City Hall is architecturally significant because of its excellent Greek Revival design. It is perfectly proportioned and in spite of its comparatively small size, gives a feeling of strength and dignity. The architect, Richard Bond (1797-1861), was described in contemporary reports as "an architect of great fame", "an architect of high reputation" and "a distinguished architect". He also designed Gore Hall - the old Library at Harvard, and Bowdoin Square Church in Boston, both no longer standing. The facade is reminiscent of Robert Mills, with the ceiling rosettes in the Council Chamber exact duplicates of those done by Alexander Parris for Faneuil Hall Market in Boston.

Salem City Documents of 1837, 38 record the following expenditures for the construction of City Hall:

Land (bought from Josiah Orne)	\$ 4,000.00
Simon M. & Augustus M. Coburn, masons	5,385.00
John Clark, Jonathan Brown, Ephraim Brown, Jr., carpenters	1,900.00
Granite Co. for facade	3,050.00
J. B. Ferguson for glass	624.75
David Tillson for Zinking	406.00
Kelly for Stucco work	381.50
Overseers of Poor for Cellar Rocks	284.09
Sundry bills	871.86
Chimney Pieces	233.00

Among the historic items inside the building are the following:

The Indian deed, dated 1686 on parchment in obsolete handwriting. The original is in a vault in the City Clerk's office, a copy is displayed in the Council Chamber. The deed, for which the Indians were paid 20 pounds, establishes title to the land for the Selectmen of Salem from the heirs of the Indian, Nanepashemet.

Records of the City from 1634 are also in the Clerk's vault.

Two plaques: one a memorial to the U.S.S. Maine, made from metal recovered from the ship; the other, given by the crew of the U.S.S. Salem in 1909 to commemorate their visit to the City during Old Home Week.

Portraits of General Henry Kimble Oliver; Leverett Saltonstall, the first Mayor; Marquis de Lafayette (a copy by Charles Osgood of a painting by S.F.B. Morse); George Washington (a copy of a Gilbert Stuart painting, done by his daughter, Jane); also a copy of a Stuart painting done for William Kerin Constable and given to the City by Abiel Abbott Low, a Salem native; Andrew Jackson, as a young man by Major R.E.W. Earle, 1833.

#### Physical Appearance

The City Hall is located on Washington Street, the main thoroughfare of Salem, with commercial structures on either side of it. Completed in 1838, this two-story building is late Greek Revival in style. The original dimensions were 32 feet high, 45 feet wide and 68 feet long. The side and rear elevations are unadorned brick while the main facade is dressed granite. Three bays wide, this facade is broken by four giant pilasters, one on each corner and one on either side of the recessed center bay. The bays are set with tall windows, 6 over 6. The central entrance is reached by a short flight of granite steps; a cast iron lamp on a bracket projects from above. The tall front double doors are made of mahogany with brass studs outlining the center panels.

The pilasters support a massive entablature whose frieze is decorated with carved stone laurel wreaths. A parapet rises from the entablature and, over the center bay, this forms a partial pediment. The latter is topped by a gold leafed eagle. This eagle is an exact copy of a Samuel McIntire carving which adorned the original gateway to Salem Common.

The first floor is occupied by various city offices. The Mayor's office and City Council Chambers are on the second floor, unaltered since 1838. The Council Chamber is notable for its fine center and corner rosettes in the ceiling, repeated in the corner rosettes of the fluted door and window framing. The original furnishings are still used in the Council Chamber.

The building was enlarged in 1878 by an extension in the rear which in no way altered its original appearance as seen from the street. The extension doubled the size of the building and brought all existing city offices under one roof.

-From documents in the Library of the Essex Institute, Salem, MA.

The interior plan is straightforward, with a central hallway flanked by offices on the first floor. The second floor is divided into three distinct sections by the stairwells. The suite of offices for the mayor occupies the front of the building; the spacious Council Chamber is centrally placed; and the rear of the floor contains additional offices. The Mayor's Office and Council Chamber retain their original appearance, and are distinguished by fine plaster ceilings decorated by paterae copied from Boston's Quincy Market.

The City Hall sits directly on Washington Street, Salem's busiest thoroughfare. It has no grounds. Environmentally, the building is enriched by the presence of a Bond-designed county courthouse built four years later a block away. Similar in scale and materials, the courthouse represents an alternate interpretation of the Greek Revival, featuring a monumental portico in antis supporting a shallow pediment.

Known views: Vignette on Map of the City of Salem by H. McIntyre, 1851.  
Wood engraving from Ballou's Pictorial, c. 1860.  
Photograph, c. 1870.  
All in the collection of the Essex Institute, Salem.

Bibliography: Manuscript city documents in the office of the City Clerk, Salem.  
Salem Gazette, 1836-38.  
Webber, C.H. and Nevins, W.S.: Old Naumkeag, Salem: 1877.

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